



Joint Standing Committee on Migration

INFORMATION PAPER

INQUIRY INTO OVERSEAS SKILLS RECOGNITION, UPGRADING AND LICENSING

Background to the inquiry

- 1.1 On 19 April 2005, the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs asked the Joint Standing Committee on Migration ('the Committee') to inquire into overseas skills recognition, upgrading and licensing in Australia.
- 1.2 Assessing the skills of those who wish to migrate to Australia as skilled migrants is a key element of the skilled migration system. The migration of skilled personnel to Australia enhances the Australian labour force and contributes greatly to the Australian economy. Skilled migration is the largest component of Australia's Migration Program, and it has been estimated that the Commonwealth Government budget could gain \$5.6 billion over ten years from the 2003-04 Migration Program alone.¹
- 1.3 The importance of skilled migration has been further highlighted by the widespread recognition that Australia faces a serious shortage of skilled labour. Peak bodies such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, and the Australian Council of Trade Unions have drawn attention to the skills shortage,² as have parliamentarians from the major and minor parties.
- 1.4 In a recent speech, the Prime Minister stated that:

We have a very dramatic shortage of skilled workers and it's one of the bigger challenges that we face...³

¹ Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs ('DIMIA'), *2003-04 Annual Report* (Canberra: DIMIA, 2004), p.23.

² Speech by ACCI Chief Executive Mr Peter Hendy to the Australian Mines and Metals Association National Conference, 10 March 2005; AIG media release, 13 August 2004; ACTU media release, 22 December 2004.

³ Speech by the Hon John Howard MP to the Business Council of Australia, 3 March 2005.

1.5 The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has indicated that:
Australia's skills crisis is here, now and growing... Australia will have a shortage of over 130,000 skilled workers over the next five years.⁴

1.6 In April 2004, the Government announced an increase in Australia's skilled migration intake to assist in addressing the skills shortage in regional areas.⁵ On 14 April 2005 the Government announced a further increase of up to 20,000 places for Australia's 2005-06 skilled migration intake.⁶

Aspects of the skilled migration system

1.7 The Skilled Stream of Australia's Migration Program is designed to target migrants who possess skills or outstanding abilities that will contribute to the Australian economy. Over 71,200 Skilled Stream visas were issued in 2003-04, and the Skilled Stream is the major component of the Migration Program, accounting for over 62 per cent of visas issued under the Program in 2003-04.⁷

1.8 The Skilled Stream includes migrants in the following categories:

- General Skilled Migration
- Employer Nominated/Sponsored Migration
- Business Skills Entry
- Distinguished Talent Visas

1.9 General Skilled Migration ('GSM') encompasses a range of permanent and temporary visas including 'Independent' visas, which account for well over half of the total Skilled Stream visas issued.

1.10 Employer Nominated / Sponsored Migration allows employers to nominate/sponsor personnel from overseas to work in Australia through a number of visa options.

1.11 Business Skills Entry also encompasses a range of visas and is designed to encourage successful business people to settle in Australia and develop new business opportunities.

⁴ Media release by Ms Jenny Macklin MP, 12 November 2004.

⁵ Media release by Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 1 April 2004. See also DIMIA, *2003-04 Annual Report* (Canberra: DIMIA, 2004), p.36.

⁶ Media release by Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 14 April 2005.

⁷ DIMIA, *2003-04 Annual Report* (Canberra: DIMIA, 2004), p.34. An overview of Skilled Stream migration can be accessed at: http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/24overview_skilled.htm.

- 1.12 Distinguished talent visas are issued to those with special or unique talents of benefit to Australia such as sportspeople, artists, and musicians.⁸

Skills assessment

- 1.13 Skills assessment is a basic requirement for all prospective GSM applicants. Prior to applying for GSM, an intending applicant must have his or her skills assessed by the relevant Australian assessing authority. The assessing authorities correspond to particular occupations and professions – for example, the skills of an applicant whose nominated occupation is dentistry will have his/her skills assessed by the Australian Dental Council.⁹
- 1.14 In order to be granted a visa under GSM, an applicant's skills must have been assessed as suitable by the assessing authority for the occupation nominated by the applicant. In addition, GSM applicants must also possess post-secondary (such as university or trade) qualifications.

Qualification assessment and professional recognition

- 1.15 Those applying for Employer Nominated/Sponsored Migration must have their qualifications assessed if registration, licensing or membership of a professional body is mandatory in the proposed field of employment. Requirements for professional recognition in Australia depend on the level of regulation governing the individual professions and on the assessment processes of the various Australian assessing authorities.
- 1.16 Australian Education International ('AEI'), which is part of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, provides information and advice through the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition ('NOOSR') on professional recognition requirements and on the comparability of overseas qualifications with Australian qualifications. AEI-NOOSR also provides information on educational systems, guidance on assessing qualifications from other countries, and is an Australian assessing authority of school teaching skills for GSM applicants.¹⁰

⁸ Further information on GSM and the other skilled migration categories can be accessed at: <http://www.immi.gov.au/migration/skilled/index.htm>. Along with the Skilled Stream, the other major migration stream within the Migration Program is the Family Stream. An overview of Family Stream migration can be accessed at: http://www.immi.gov.au/facts/29overview_family.htm.

⁹ A list of skilled occupations and Australian assessing authorities can be accessed at: <http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/1121i.pdf>.

¹⁰ Further information on AEI-NOOSR and professional recognition requirements can be accessed at: <http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/Default.aspx>.

The Committee's inquiry

- 1.17 The Committee will investigate Australia's current arrangements for overseas skills recognition and related issues of licensing and registration for Skilled Stream migrants. Because skills recognition can also be an important issue for people who come to Australia outside of the Skilled Stream, the Committee will also examine the arrangements that are in place for other migrant groups needing post-arrival skills assessment, recognition, registration, or upgrading, including arrangements for Australian citizens returning to Australia with overseas qualifications.
- 1.18 The Committee will also compare Australia's overseas skills recognition arrangements with those of other major immigration countries and will seek to identify areas where Australia's procedures can be improved. The full terms of reference for the Committee's inquiry are set out below.
- 1.19 Over the course of 2002-04 the Committee conducted a review of Australia's skilled labour migration programs. The results of this review are detailed in the Committee's report, *To make a contribution: Review of skilled labour migration programs 2004*. This review touched on the recognition of overseas qualifications in Australia, but had a broader focus on various aspects of Australia's skilled migration programs and their competitiveness in the context of overseas migration programs.¹¹

Terms of reference

- 1.20 The terms of reference for the Committee's inquiry are as follows:
1. Investigate and report on current arrangements for overseas skills recognition and associated issues of licensing and registration for:
 - Skills stream migrants who obtain assessment prior to migrating;
 - Families of skill stream migrants, family stream migrants and humanitarian entrants who seek assessment/registration/upgrading after arrival;
 - Temporary residents who need skills assessment/recognition; and
 - Australian citizens returning after significant time overseas, with overseas qualifications.
 2. Consider how Australia's arrangements compare with those of other major immigration countries.
 3. Identify areas where Australia's procedures can be improved including in terms of:
 - Communication of processes to users;
 - Efficiency of processes and elimination of barriers;

¹¹ This report can be accessed at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/skillmig/report.htm>. Copies of the report can also be obtained from the Migration Committee Secretariat (contact details below).

- Early identification and response to persons needing skills upgrading (e.g. bridging courses);
- Awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers;
- Achieving greater consistency in recognition of qualifications for occupational licensing by state and territory regulators; and
- Alternative approaches to skills assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications.

Submissions

1.21 The Committee welcomes submissions to the inquiry from interested organisations and individuals. Submissions addressing one or more of the terms of reference should be forwarded by post or e-mail to:

The Committee Secretary
 Joint Standing Committee on Migration
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600

Tel: 02 6277 4560

Fax: 02 6277 8506

E-mail: jscm@aph.gov.au

1.22 Submissions should be forwarded by **24 June 2005**.

1.23 Information on preparing a submission to a parliamentary committee inquiry can be accessed at:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/documnts/howsub.htm>.¹²

Relevant internet sites

1.24 The following internet sites may be of assistance for those seeking further information on migration issues:

- Joint Standing Committee on Migration:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/index.htm>
- Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs: <http://www.immi.gov.au>
- Australian Education International / National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition: <http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/Default.aspx>

¹² For further information on preparing a submission, please contact the Migration Committee Secretariat or the Clerk Assistant (Committees), House of Representatives, Parliament House, CANBERRA ACT 2600 (tel: 02 6277 4399; fax: 02 6277 4435; e-mail: committee.reps@aph.gov.au).